NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER 1-9959 JANUARY 14, 1976
EDWARD CONLEY

TUN ABDUL RAZAK'S DEATH

ANNCR:

TUN ABDUL RAZAK, PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA DIED UNEXPECTEDLY ON WEDNESDAY IN LONDON, WHERE HE HAD BEEN TREATED FOR AN UNDISCLOSED ILLNESS. VOA'S EDWARD CONLEY HAS THESE OBSERVATIONS ON THE PRIME MINISTER AND HIS ROLES IN BOTH DOMESTIC MALAYSIAN AFFAIRS AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN COOPERATIVE EFFORTS.

VOICE:

FIFTY-THREE YEAR OLD TUN ABDUL RAZAK HAD WORKED FOR ALMOST TWENTY YEARS AS AN IMPORTANT POLITICAL FORCE, BOTH IN MALAYSIA AND IN THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN REGION. THE SUDDENNESS OF HIS QUIET, RECENT TRIP TO EUROPE FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT, AND HIS DEATH WILL LEAVE BOTH HIS COUNTRY AND THE REGION -- PARTICULARLY THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS -- WITH A MAJOR VOID TO FILL.

TUN RAZAK, A QUIET, UNIMPOSING MAN WHO JOKED EASILY WITH NEWSMEN AND COLLEAGUES AND ENJOYED A GOOD GAME OF GOLF, WORKED IN THE SAME LOW KEY MANNER TO DRAMATICALLY IMPROVE MALAYSIA'S ECONOMY AND TO EASE ITS RACIAL TENSIONS. DURING THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS, HE HAD MOVED MALAYSIA TO THE FOREFRONT IN THE SEARCH FOR SOUTHEAST ASIAN REGIONAL COOPERATION.

FOR MOST OF HIS POLITICAL CAREER, TUN RAZAK WORKED IN THE SHADOW OF INDEPENDENT MALAYSIA'S FIRST PRIME MINISTER, TUN ABDUL RAHMAN. HE PUSHED NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS, AND IN NINETEEN SIXTY-NINE WAS GIVEN WIDE POWER TO RESTORE ORDER FOLLOWING VIOLENT RACE RIOTS BETWEEN MALAYS AND CHINESE WHICH SERIOUSLY THREATENED THE COUNTRY.

RAZAK WAS APPOINTED PRIME MINISTER IN 1970 WHEN TUNKU RAHMAN RETIRED AND HIS SCOPE BROADENED TO INCLUDE NOT ONLY DOMESTIC AFFAIRS BUT REGIONAL ONES, TOO. UNDER TUN RAZAK, MALAYSIA BECAME AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF ASEAN, PROMOTING REGIONAL COOPERATION AND TUN RAZAK'S OWN PROPOSAL TO TURN THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN REGION INTO WHAT HE TERMED A ZONE OF PEACE AND NEUTRALITY. AT THE LAST ASEAN ANNUAL MEETING, HELD SOON AFTER THE COMMUNIST TAKEOVER OF INDOCHINA, TUN RAZAK PROPOSED THE ADMISSION OF THOSE NEW REGIMES INTO THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS. AND, MALAYSIA ITSELF QUICKLY RECOGNIZED THE NEW GOVERNMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA.

WHILE PRESSING FOR GREATER AREA COOPERATION AND LESS DEPENDENCE ON THE WEST, TUN RAZAK ALSO CLOSELY GUARDED THE AFFAIRS OF STATE AT HOME. HE WAS ELECTED PRIME MINISTER ON HIS OWN DURING 1974 ELECTIONS WHICH WERE CONDUCTED WITHOUT MAJOR RACIAL INCIDENTS. THIS WAS SOON AFTER THE PRIME MINISTER HAD TRAVELLED TO PEKING TO ESTABLISH DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH CHINA -- THE FIRST OF THE ASEAN NATIONS TO DO SO. STILL, WHEN CLANDESTINE CHINESE BROADCASTS -- THOUGHT TO BE BEAMED FROM MAINLAND CHINA -- CONTINUED TO CALL FOR A COMMUNIST TAKEOVER IN MALAYSIA, TUN RAZAK FIRED OFF A STRONG PROTEST TO PEKING. AND AS COMMUNIST INSURGENCY INTENSIFIED IN MALAYSIA LAST YEAR, TUN RAZAK INTRODUCED SWEEPING, TOUGH EMERGENCY POWERS TO COMBAT THE GUERILLA MOVEMENT.

NOW, WITH TUN RAZAK'S DEATH, HIS DOMESTIC PROBLEMS AND POLICIES FALL INTO THE HANDS OF DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER HUSSEIN ONN, NAMED ACTING PRIME MINISTER BY RAZAK SHORTLY BEFORE HIS TRIP TO EUROPE FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT LAST DECEMBER.

AS FOR ASEAN, TUN RAZAK'S DEATH, ALONG WITH THE UNSETELLED LEADERSHIP QUESTION IN THAILAND, COULD MEAN FURTHER POSTPONEMENT OF A PLANNED SUMMIT MEETING WHICH WAS TO HAVE ATTEMPTED TO FORMALIZE THE MALAYSIAN CALL FOR A ZONE OF PEACE AND NEUTRALITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA.

MALAYSIA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA HAVE LOST A QUIET, BUT EFFECTIVE WORKER FOR PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT.

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